Neo-Colonization of the Mind:
The Effect of English in the ex-French Colonies of Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam

by
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with
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Abstract

This paper will examine the effect of the introduction of the English language to the education systems of three ex-French colonies: Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam as an extension of

Colonizing the Mind: The Effect of French Colonization on Education Systems in Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam. This will be accomplished by first summarizing the effect of French colonization on education systems in the three case study countries before analyzing the influx of English. Finally, the paper argues that English represents a threat to the continuing political and economic interests of the ex-colonizer, France.
Introduction

This study is the culmination of my undergraduate degree studying intentional education policy and French. My junior year, I studied abroad in Geneva, Switzerland, where I performed an independent study of non-traditional education for refugees. This interest led me to pursue a summer internship teaching computer science as a form of economic empowerment in Nosy Be, Madagascar. In Madagascar, I was exposed first-hand to the effects of French colonization on education systems. My students were not literate in their native language of Malagasy. To this day, formal education in Madagascar is only available in French. Fascinated by the intersection between French colonialism and education, I decided to write my senior thesis on the politicization of education systems in French colonies. While writing my thesis, I realized that English was beginning to replace French as a primary or secondary language of instruction in ex-French colonies. The Keck Center for International Studies Edward Haley fellowship allows to me continue my study by exploring the erosion of French power under the neo-colonial influence of English in ex-French colonial school systems.
Background: Linguistic Imperialism

“What you want in the state, you must put into the school.”¹ Social scientists and philosophers alike regard education as a function of political institutions. Education systems indoctrinate students in the values of a society and have been identified as the main agent of political socialization.² For this reason, education was widely employed as an important tool for colonizing countries when establishing political order in their new territories. The French government was particularly interested in using education as a method to spread French values and culture under their predominant colonial foreign policy: the doctrine of assimilation. While widely successful in the post-colonial era, French continues to be widely used in her ex-colonies. However, a new challenger is on the horizon that threatens the colonial interests of France: English.

In the post-Cold War era, English has become the global lingua franca through linguistic imperialism. International intuitions such as the United Nations, World Bank, and World Trade Organization have all encouraged the spread of English. Current scholarship exists to explain the ways in which the use of the English language in the post-colonial era promotes western interests.³ Widely regarded as leading scholars in English linguistic imperialism, David Crystal and Robert Phillipson explain the rise of English. In English as a Global Language, Crystal explains, “international language dominance is not solely the result of military might. It may take a militarily powerful nation to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful nation

¹ Mangus O. Bassey, Western Education and Political Domination in Africa: A Study in Critical and Dialogical Pedagogy (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), 7.
to maintain and expand it”. If military and economic dominance of England, then the United States, allowed English to become the global language, what motivates the U.S.A. to continue this expansionist policy? Phillipson answers by asserting that since 1942, “the need for new markets due to capital over-accumulation was a primary concern of US foreign policy”. Just like the French, American’s primary foreign policy concern is the expansion of economic interests.

This paper will outline the ways France used education systems to pursue her own economic and political interests in the colonies of Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam before showing how neo-colonial American policies have enabled English to challenge French dominance in ex-colonial schools. These three countries were chosen because of their importance in the French empire. Algeria maintains the closest ties to the French government and is the strongest example of assimilation. Senegal was the site of the first French colonial school and remains an important regional hub in West Africa. Vietnam, while not an ex-African colony, offers insight into French colonial education in other regions of the world.

Role of Education in Assimilationist French Colonial Policy

In the pre-colonial area, African nations practiced “traditional African education” which aimed to pass “worthwhile” traditions from generation to generation in order to prepare youths for adult life within society. This was accomplished through non-formal institutions such as parents, extended family, peers, and societal influence. There was no separation between education and daily life as children learned by doing. A major goal of African education was *summum bonum* or social sensitivity, which emphasized a sense of belonging to society.

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Intellectual training came from learning traditional proverbs, poetry, songs, and other cultural knowledge. Arithmetic was taught through counting crops. Citizens with occupations such as priests, village heads, fishermen, medicine men and women, diviners, rainmakers, and rulers were educated through internships. This educational system changed dramatically under colonial rule as European education systems encouraged formal schools.

Education in all nations colonized by colonial powers followed the same basic trends. First, Christian missionaries from the colonial powers exported religious education based closely upon western models. As a Catholic missionary, Father Wuters, concluded, “We knew the best way to make conversions in pagan countries was to open schools.” Over time, missionaries adapted the European education models to the colonial context. A major shift occurred when European governments became involved and began to fund colonial schools. Each nation developed a system of education that would best suit their countries’ respective needs. France prioritized the teaching of the French language, culture, literature, and civilization. The director of the Ecole Coloniale, G. Hardy believed, “A knowledge of French is the first essential to secure the unity of our empire.” Under the doctrine of assimilation, French colonial education’s mail goal was assimilation of her colonial populations to French identity, language, and culture.

Claude Adrien Helvétius, credited as the intellectual father of French colonial assimilation, believed that, “Education makes us what we are.” Underlying his conviction were two basic principles: the first is the equality of human beings and the second, “education as a

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8 Mangus O. Bassey, *Western Education and Political Domination in Africa*, 12.
corrective to environmental differences."\textsuperscript{11} Under the colonial doctrine of assimilation, the French used education as a method of indoctrinating their citizens into the French value system and language. Education in colonies is primarily concerned with training the colonial people to meet the economic needs of their colonial power. This concept first manifested in the 1860s in French colony of Senegal with the \textit{Ecole des Otages}. These schools quickly deviated from their metropolitan French counterparts. A sharp departure from the purported policy of assimilation, these schools began to teach agriculture and other practical skills rather than literature or philosophy. William Ponty, Director of the Ecole Primaire Supérieure declared, “We avoid everything that reeks of scholarship, of books, of laboratories… let us remain in the cave of which Plato speaks so beautifully and let us look at the overly bright sun only through its reflection in the muddy waters of African streams.”\textsuperscript{12} The education systems developed as a method of training for participation in the French dominated economy.

Assimilationist goals can be seen in the language of instruction: French. Initially, courses were taught by French teachers exported to the colonies. However, as time progressed and shortages occurred, African instructors took their place. Using French as the primary language of instruction also allowed local schools to use teaching materials directly from metropolitan France. Therefore, instructors were not limited to materials adapted for use in the colonies. It is important to note that French was used not only as a method of assimilation, but also as a practical measure for colonizers who had no interest in learning the vast number of African dialects spoken in their new colonies.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Raymond F. Betts, \textit{Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890 – 1914}, 15.
\textsuperscript{13} Remi P. Clingnet and Philip J. Foster, “French and British Colonial Education in Africa”, 194.
While the French intended to impose their mentality on their colonial peoples through education, they realized that the general population was not being assimilated. Instead, a small group of elites assimilated to the French language and culture, leaving the masses who maintained their indigenous language and culture. This perpetuated French stereotypes of the colonized people as only a small minority of the colonized people were seen by the French as intelligent enough to successfully assimilate. The gulf between the wealthy, educated elites and uneducated poor widened. This prompted the French government to establish a small group of secondary schools or Écoles Primaires Supérieures as well as a handful of advanced technical and academic institutions.

In the years leading up to World War II, only 0.004% of Africans living in French colonies attended school. Children who had the privilege to attend usually lived in dormitories on school grounds because of the large geographic areas served by one school. Students were only able to interact with their families during the summer holiday because of the difficulties and costs associated with transportation to and from the school site. Therefore, students spent most of their childhood living primarily with French adults in a French institution. By assimilating the elite into French culture, students were separated from their societies. However, the students themselves understood that they would never be accepted completely into French society because of their black skin. The following passage from an elementary school textbook from the 1920s illustrates this divide:

“I live in Africa. I am an African. I have black skin. I belong to the black race. I am a black African. My teacher is French. He is a European. He has white skin. He belongs to the white race. He’s a white man. The black has curly hair that he shaves completely. The

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white has straight hair blonde or black, which he combs with a brush with care. The black grows a beard. The white has a beard and a mustache which he can let grow or shave often. The black wears few clothes. He wears full and light cotton garments. The white is better dressed. He wears clothing made of woolen cloth.”

In schools, the divide between Africans and their white French counterparts was constantly reinforced. However, the texts would also distinguish the student from other natives. *Mamadou and Bineta Read and Write Fluently*, a text used to promote French literacy in French colonial schools, reads:

> “But the native farmers do not know how to make palm oil well: they throw the fruit into boiling water, then rove it, allow it to cool and crush it with their feet. The oil is dirty; it is not good; it keeps badly and becomes acid. Children, if late you have a palm oil plantation, buy a machine called an oil presser.”

Once again, a stark divide is created between the ignorant native farmer and the African student. Therefore, African students educated in French colonial schools neither belonged to their native communities nor French society. This divide continued after decolonization as a legacy of French Assimilation.

**Modern Day Education in Ex-French Colonies**

The education system in contemporary Africa still serves as a tool to keep power and wealth in the hands of the elites that were created in the colonial system. Schools are still taught in French meaning that poor students often do not understand the language of instruction. French is also used by all governmental agencies meaning that well-paying bureaucratic jobs must be held by individuals educated in the French-speaking system. Post-colonial African education

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systems still use books imported from Europe. African universities generate little research, and the research which does exist is published in French. Education systems in ex-French colonies are dependent upon France and in turn the products of the education systems are dependent upon France.\textsuperscript{20}

The pervasiveness of French culture post-decolonization led to backlash among the elite group of French-educated Africans.\textsuperscript{21} The small number of students who received an education under the French colonial administration became doctors, teachers, low-level administrators, and intellectuals in the newly independent nations.\textsuperscript{22} Abdou Moumouni, who educated in the French colonial system and became an educator in Nigeria, believed:

“In the general concept of the educational system inherited from the period of colonial domination cannot be applicable (in Africa) if one is to respond to the new political conditions and to the economic and social objectives which have resulted from the accession to political independence.”\textsuperscript{23}

The modern-day education systems in ex-French colonies are relics of the colonial era. The educated elite that now govern Africa in the wake of independence are not representative of the African population. They are predominately Christian due to the role of missionaries in colonial education. The elites are also wealthier than the general population, speak French, and follow French customs.\textsuperscript{24} While African, they represent the culture of the colonizer.

In Vietnam, the effect of French colonization is less pronounced. This is probably due to the strength of formal educational institutions in Vietnam before French colonization. Indochina was previously under the influence of the Chinese empire and its formal school were based on

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\textsuperscript{20} Mangus O. Bassey, \textit{Western Education and Political Domination in Africa}, 6-10, 47.
\textsuperscript{22} Gail Paradise Kelly, \textit{French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa}, 203.
\textsuperscript{23} Mangus O. Bassey, \textit{Western Education and Political Domination in Africa} 50.
\textsuperscript{24} Mangus O. Bassey, \textit{Western Education and Political Domination in Africa} 51.
\end{flushleft}
the Confucianist Chinese model. Therefore, Vietnam was more resistant to the effects of French colonization and education. French was further pushed out during the Vietnam War. Today, less than 3% of public secondary schools in Vietnam use French and less than 0.7% of the total population is francophone.\textsuperscript{25}

Even though education plays a role in decolonization, public school systems are slow to adapt to change post-decolonization and do not revert to indigenous education systems. Schools that developed under colonial rule perpetuate social, political, and economic systems that disadvantage indigenous populations and spread soft power (economic and cultural influence) of the colonizer, France.

\textbf{Legacy of French Colonization in the Algerian Education System}

French colonial schools never achieved the mass participation needed for assimilation to be successful. In 1961, 1.5 million school-aged children in Algeria received no form of formal education and 90 percent of the population was illiterate.\textsuperscript{26} The Front de Liberation Nationale (F.L.N.) named education reform as a top priority for the newly independent nation. The 1962 Charter of Tripoli outlined the future goals for Algeria:

\begin{quote}
“Algerian culture will be national, revolutionary and scientific. FIRST, its role as a ‘national’ culture will imply above all that the Arabic language, which is the very expression of our country’s cultural values, should be restored to its dignity and efficacy as a language of civilization. Algerian culture will therefore apply itself to the task of reconstituting, reevaluating and making known the national patrimony and its double humanism, classical and modern, in order to reintroduce them into intellectual life and the education of popular sentiment. Accordingly, it will fight the cultural cosmopolitism and western impregnation, which have contributed to inculcating into many Algerians a contempt for their language and their national values.”\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} The Economist, “French blows its horn.” \textit{The Economist}, Nov. 20 1997.
\textsuperscript{26} Anne Laaredj-Campbell, \textit{Changes in Female Literacy Practices in Algeria}, 106.
\textsuperscript{27} Anne Laaredj-Campbell, \textit{Changes in Female Literacy Practices in Algeria}, 108.
These goals included a return to the use of Arabic as the primary language of instruction and a new focus on scientific teachings. The shift sparked the Arabization movement. Based on the teachings of revolutionary leader Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis’s, Arabization involved the following elements outlined in the Charter of Algeirs under the “Elimination of Illiteracy and Development of a National Culture”:

“a) Restoration of the national culture and progressive Arabization of teaching on a scientific basis. Of all the tasks of the Revolution, this is the most delicate, because it requires modern cultural instruments and cannot be accomplished precipitately without risking the sacrifice of whole generations.  
b) The preservation of the national popular cultural heritage.  
c) The extension of the school system by making all grades of education universally accessible.  
d) The Algerianization of school syllabuses and their adaptation to the realities of our country.  
e) The extension of mass education methods and the mobilization of all national organizations for struggle against illiteracy so that all citizens may be taught to read and write within the least delay.”  

The emphasis of education in the founding document of the independent Algeria clearly displays the government’s prioritization of the new school systems.

In 1962, Arabization reforms were introduced at the primary education level. Algerian officials imported teachers from Syria and Egypt to implement Arabic primary school curriculums. By 1984, Arabic instruction spread to secondary schools. However, to this day French remains the primary language of instruction at the University level for many subjects including as math, sciences, and medicine. French is necessary due to the lack of academic materials printed in Arabic as well as a scarcity of qualified Arabic speaking professors. Another cornerstone of the Arabization movement is the focus on Arabic cultural heritage in an effort to counteract the cultural influence of French. School budgets increased to 30 percent of the Algerian national budget by the mid 1970s. Attendance in schools increased to 25 percent of school aged children by the 1990s.  

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29 Anne Laaredj-Campbell, Changes in Female Literacy Practices in Algeria, 127.
outnumbered supply. Consequently, quality suffered as schools were overcrowded. Over time the number of Algerian teachers rose dramatically to 167,700, only 4,300 of them foreigners, by 1984.

This was due, in part, to a 1970s-policy shift. Colonel Houari Boumedienne’s government introduced a new system with six years of primary education, four years of middle school, three years of secondary school, and finally four years of university level. However, as education was democratized at the time of independence, school was highly selective. Every school-aged child had the opportunity to attend school without payment if he or she could maintain his or her standardized test scores. High drop-out rates under Boumedineene’s education system demanded reform.

The current public school system in Algeria is operated jointly under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. Islam is a compulsory subject. Attendance at the primary school level has greatly improved with 99% of boys and 96% of girls regularly attending classes. While an improvement from the colonial education system, the public schools in Algeria are still facing problems with overcrowding, high student dropout rates, and scare funding. Students are taught primarily in Arabic and begin learning French in the third grade. Algeria’s system prescribes nine years of compulsory primary education followed by three years of secondary education. Students may choose technical and vocational or general and specialized schooling. In order to receive the baccalauréat degree at the end of secondary school, each student must complete a final exam with an average of 50% or higher. This exam covers every subject studied while in school and less than half of students pass. Students who survive

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
33 Anne Laaredj-Campbell, Changes in Female Literacy Practices in Algeria, 128.
this rigorous exam may then attend one of 47 Algerian universities or 10 colleges. While the government subsidizes this education, the facilities are overcrowded and underfunded. Equipment is outdated and instructors are under qualified to teach the material.

Wealthy families send their students abroad to circumvent the troubled public education system in Algeria. These students are overwhelmingly sent to boarding schools and private universities in France. As French is the primary language used in government and other relatively high paying careers, this system increased social stratification. The wealthy students speak French in schools and the lower-income populations use Arabic. This is a direct result of French colonial policy; this system allows French culture to continue to dominate in Algeria.

**Rise of English in Algeria**

In the late 1990s, Algeria had the largest French speaking population outside of metropolitan France. Since the 1970s, French has been a mandatory second language in public schools with English introduced as a second foreign language in the fourth grade. Frustrated by the continued dominance of French over Arabic, the pro-Arabization lobby switched tactics. Rather than pushing Arabic, they persuaded the government to introduce English as a substitute for French. In 1993, fourth grade students were given the choice between English and French. Only three years later, English overtook French as the most widely taught foreign language in Algeria.

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35 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.” *Journal of World Languages* 1, no.1 (2014), 49.
36 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.”, 50-51.
The rise of English may be misleading. In 2004 survey, Algerian high school students were given the phrase, “When I choose English, this does not mean that I reject French” and asked if they agreed. 76.4% of students supported this statement. Furthermore, 100% of students surveyed replied they were against “monolingualism”. This data suggests that rather than replacing French, Algerian youth are embracing a multilingual society where Arabic, French, and English are all spoken. Algerian Masters students are also very aware of the global dominance of English. Given the choice between English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, and German more than 92% of students chose English. According to the author of this survey, this means:

“the preservation of the French language in the North African former colony of France does not necessarily guarantee its presence in the long run, especially with English as a standby… were French to decline in Algeria, it is English and not Arabic which would replace it as the language of economic power”.

English offers economic opportunity that cannot be equaled by Arabic.

English also offers a clean slate. The French language is associated with a painful colonial past while English has no such negative connotation.

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<tr>
<th>Table 4. Association of French with “painful past” and size of town.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language associated with a painful past</td>
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The table above shows the attitude of Algerians toward French based on where they live (urban, suburban, or rural).

While French remains the dominant language, it may soon be overtaken by English.

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38 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.”, 51.
39 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.”, 52.
40 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.”, 52-53.
41 Mohammad Benrabah, “Competition between four ‘world’ languages in Algeria.”, 53.
Legacy of French Colonization in the Senegalese Education System

The French Colonial education system left lasting divides in Senegal. A study performed in rural schools in southeastern Senegal found that both teachers and students still see a tension between Indigenous and western forms of education. This leads pupils to devalue indigenous knowledge and education in relation to western pedagogy. The use of French as the primary language of instruction in public schools continues to exacerbate this tension. This negative perception stems from the French colonial influence on Senegalese schools. One scholar noted the, “francophone African educational system is essentially a French education system ill-implemented by Africans and Westerners on African soil.”

By 2003, less than 20% of Senegal’s population spoke French while over 80% used Wolof. This disparity can be attributed to the limited reach of Senegal’s French education system as well as the relative success of the Wolofization movement. Historically, Senegal has been divided between six major national language groups: Diola, Malinké, Pulaar, Serer, Soninké, and Wolof. In order to counteract the spread of French, these language groups are banding together to use Wolof as the lingua franca. In 1981, an experimental program introduced six of the 37 indigenous languages back into schools. However, public schools lacked

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43 Karla Giuliano Sarr, “We Lost Our Culture with Civilization”, 119.
the teaching materials, qualified teachers, and community support needed for the program to succeed.\(^{46}\)

Using French rather than the students’ native languages, sets pupils up for failure. As parents often do not speak French, children are introduced to a new language, French, on the first day of school. These factors contribute to students to feeling overwhelmed by their new environment, new curriculum, and new language. As a result, students have high dropout rates which increases the already low literacy rate in the country. Even though the use of French makes learning much more difficult for students, most still prefer to be educated in the colonial language. During the Senegalese independence movement, leaders, including President Senghor, understand that French was needed in order to participate in international commerce and diplomacy. This reliance on French knowledge and language in schools reflects the societal realities of Senegalese students. The ability to speak French is a prerequisite for stable employment, particularly in urban areas. Universities in Senegal were founded by French colonists and taught entirely in French. Furthermore, the Senegalese leaders who designed the curriculum post-independence had themselves been educated with French curriculum in French schools. Coleman writes, “they know no other, and as a product of that system, they have a vested interest in it.”\(^{47}\) Politically, the use of French in schools was a necessary choice.

The use of French maintained and expanded the divide between the elite group of wealthy, French-educated, Senegalese, and the poorer, national language speakers. The wealthy continue to leave Senegal to attend university in France. These students either settle outside of Senegal or return to take the relatively high paying jobs in the government and private sectors.

\(^{46}\) Karla Giuliano Sarr, “We Lost Our Culture with Civilization”, 117 -119.
Access to education is also a problem in Senegal. In 1978, Senegal applied to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to bail out the struggling economy. The ensuing program led to cuts in education. This resulted in a lack of qualified teachers, school facilities, and resources. Children without access to education, and therefore French, struggle to find employment. Political participation is almost impossible for the majority of Senegalese citizens who are not literate in French.

**Rise of English in Senegal**

In an effort to move away from French colonial education, the French–friendly policies from *Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar (CLAD)* were phased out of Senegalese education systems. The Ministry of National Education (MEN) established the *Bureau Technique pour l’Enseignement de l’Anglais* or Technical Office for the Teaching of English. English is now found at all levels of formal schooling in Senegal, including primary schools. As in Algeria, English has become the number one foreign language taught in Senegalese schools. English is popular because it represents increased economic opportunity and social standing. An analysis of the three most widely read newspapers in Senegal, *Le Soliel, Sud Quotidien*, and *Walf Fadjri*, found that 23 out of 30 job postings for postgraduate-level jobs over a five year period required a “good knowledge of English”. The Senegalese government has even shown an interest in English. The President of Senegal hired English instructors for the Conseil des Ministres and other senior level staff.

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While there are many benefits to learning English, implementing English within Senegalese schools has been challenging. Most notably, schools suffer from a lack of English materials. Wealthier schools in urban areas receive a greater proportion of these scarce resources. Students in rural areas have few English materials and often lack access to the internet resources. Furthermore, urban areas are much more likely to have qualified English teachers than their rural counterparts.51 A 2005 survey of attitudes of the Senegalese people toward English found that a staggering 86% of people thought that the “attention given to English in the education system should be increased”.52 Much like in Algeria, English has served as a compliment to an already multilingual society rather than as a replacement to French.

Legacy of French Colonization in the Vietnamese Education System

Since decolonization, Vietnam has continued to be involved in military conflicts, most notably the Vietnam War. Schools shifted their focus to vocational training, preparing students for manufacturing jobs that would assist the war effort. Schools promoted Vietnamese ideology reinforcing national pride and socialism. A World Bank report identifies the differences between education in occupied and liberated areas:

“In Saigon Government-controlled areas, education gradually transitioned from European and French-influenced education to North American-dominated education. General education experienced several changes with the components of primary education (5 years), lower secondary education (4 years), and upper secondary education (3 years) including many streams. Higher education was more academic than practice-oriented with an emphasis on fundamental sciences, laws, economy and administration. Universities of engineering, technology, and agriculture and forestry went through slower development. Despite the impact and influence of North American education, young

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people still maintained their spirit of resistance during the period when the Saigon Government controlled the Southern urban areas.”

Conversely:

“All After the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Southern Vietnam had been established in liberated areas, students followed 12-year curriculum with textbooks that were very different from those used in temporarily occupied areas, demonstrating patriotic and resistance spirits.”

At the end of the war, priorities shifted back to pre-war goals.

In 1975, the Vietnamese government shifted away from vocational training to refocus on literacy. Now that free primary schooling had been achieved, the administration attempted to combat illiteracy in 12 – 50 year olds. Private schools were nationalized in compliance with communist ideology. Schools in the north and south were unified under a common central education policy:

“a) Educational objectives were defined as: the provision of care and education for the younger generation from early childhood to adulthood with the aim of laying the initial foundations for all-round human development; implementing universalization of education to facilitate carrying out three revolutions (of productive relationships, science and technology, and culture and ideology); training and fostering -- in line with the requirements of labor division -- an increase in the size of the working staff.

b) For education content, focus was placed on “Improving the quality of comprehensive education, and producing a new type of worker who were masters and able to shoulder the cause of people’s socialism construction.”

c) Educational principles included learning together with practice, education and work, and the school and society linkages were strengthened.

d) The structure of the education system was revised; the 12-year system in the South and 10-year system in the North were replaced by a new 12-year general education structure, in which primary and lower secondary schools were combined and preparation was made for streaming in upper secondary schools. A number of specialized universities were established and developed.”

54 World Bank, Education in Vietnam: Development History, Challenges, and Solutions, 8.
These unifying policies were completed by 1996 when all textbooks had been replaced, at every level of schooling. While relatively successful, this education reform suffered due to the war-torn economy and unrealistic expectations. Even though the country moved from a government controlled economy to a “socialist-oriented market mechanism”, the communist ideology in Vietnam promoted a strong belief that education should be subsidized for all children. After the war, there was not enough money for this to be feasible. Furthermore, Vietnam suffered from a scarcity of qualified teachers as enrollment went down during the war years. Therefore, Vietnamese school systems began charging tuition after primary school. Secondary school children were sorted based on performance and interest, which took the pressure off institutions of higher education as more people pursued vocational training. These reforms were extremely effective and by the 1990s, over 1.7 million additional students attended primary school. Enrollment in vocation training jumped from 95,000 in 1993 to 128,700 the next year and five major Universities were established in Hanoi, Hochiminh City, Thai-Nguyen, Hue, and Danang.\(^5\)

To this day, education is central to Vietnamese culture. This is reflected in modern day political rhetoric as education is considered “a national priority.” As the country has grown wealthier in the past few decades, educational opportunities have expanded. While education has improved for the wealthy, these gains have been distributed unequally. Poor, rural segments of the population still lack access to education, while wealthy, urban regions benefit from increased spending on schools. This division can be traced back to the creation of the mini-elite by French colonial policy makers. The remnants of French colonization can also be seen in Vietnam’s membership in the Organization International de la Francophonie (OIF). Michelle Jean,

Secretary-General of the OIF, praised Vietnam’s commitment to the OIF, while stressing the importance of economic relationships between France and Vietnam. While French is not an official language, French remains a perquisite for employment as a diplomatic official or civil servant.56

Rise of English in Vietnam

Unlike in Algeria and Senegal, the Vietnamese government did little to use English as a replacement for French.57 Instead, English is on the rise in Vietnam because the general population created a demand for English. In Vietnamese public schools, foreign language is mandatory for all students in senior high school (Grades 10 -12). Students are given the choice between Russian, English, and French. The Vietnam War was a linguistic turning point as north Vietnam was funded by the USSR and China and the south backed by the United States of America. The influx of Russian and English moved Vietnam away from French. The close ties between Northern Vietnam and the Soviet Union made Russian the secondary language of choice for many years. English was not offered in public schools until 1971.58 It became widespread in 1986 when the Vietnamese Communist Party implemented the Doi moi economic reform. This open door policy made English necessary to compete in the economy.59 In 2003, a Vietnamese informant reported:

“It can be said that the English has become a must for success in both studying and working. One of the most common requirements in job advertisements is proficiency in

English. Since 1986, the year the government began to apply its open door policy, language centers have mushroomed all over Ho Chi Minh City and other big cities and towns. English is also compulsory at university level and it helps both students and workers to gain scholarships to go abroad”.

Today, English has far surpassed both French and Russian. In one junior high in Ho Chi Minh City 23 of 28 foreign language classes were in English. In 2002, the Vietnamese government expanded the curriculum to include mandatory English classes at both the primary and secondary school levels.

This table shows the number of periods which teach English in the Vietnamese curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education (forms)</th>
<th>Number of Periods Taught Each Week</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary (Forms 1-3)</td>
<td>2/week/35 weeks</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary (Forms 4-8)</td>
<td>3/week/35 weeks</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary (9)</td>
<td>2/week/35 weeks</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary (10-12)</td>
<td>3/week/35 weeks</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>805</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some students will choose to study English beyond the mandatory 805 periods. The new program also includes a series of “advanced programs” in select Universities which teach math, physics, chemistry, as well as other STEM subjects with English as the language of instruction.

This explosion of demand for English led to a shortage of qualified teachers and supplies, both in formal and non-formal educational institutions in Vietnam. One school teacher complained:

“All the books present a lot of exercises on grammar and reading comprehension. I used to teach high school and left after eighteen years. From my experience, the students cannot use the language in communicating. There used to be no tapes for listening, and there are no listening exercises. They have made the tapes for listening now, but the books are just the same”.

While English teaching is widespread in Vietnam, it is largely ineffective. There is also a backlash from Vietnamese people who worry that the expansion of English at the primary school level will erode national identity in Vietnam.65

Conclusion

English has become a prerequisite for participation in the global economy. In Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam English has begun to replace French as the language of trade. Ironically, the efforts made by nationalist language groups to return to their native language allowed English to compete with ex-French colonies as students want to move away from French. English lacks the negative colonial association of the French language. In Vietnam, the shift to English was expedited by the Vietnam war and subsequent open door economic policy of the French government. However, French is deeply rooted in the education systems of Algeria and Senegal. These countries are not linguistically homogenous so English is being added to the melting pot of languages. English does not directly replace French. Currently the spread of English has been stemmed by the shortage of teachers and materials. As supply rises to meet demand, English may replace French as the dominant economic and political language in Algeria and Senegal.

Works Cited


